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# THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

JUNE 1st. 1863.

## ESSAY ON MUSIC.

*From the 'Penny Cyclopædia.'*

*(Continued from page 46.)*

Vocal music is entirely devoid of that ambiguity which some think a merit in instrumental music, and some consider a defect. Words fix the intention of musical sounds, leaving nothing for the hearer to conjecture; for though the more or less of truth in the expression will depend on the skill of the composer, yet he must be utterly destitute of reason to give to revenge the tones of love, or to joy those of despair. It is true that he does not always read with discriminating judgment the words selected by him, or committed to his charge—that in emphasis he is sometimes erroneous, and in accentuation frequently faulty; and for these failings in the artist, the art itself has been unjustly condemned by writers whose repute gives weight to their censure. But the heaviest charge brought against composers of vocal music, and that which has exposed them to the keenest ridicule, is their eagerness to express the literal meaning of a particular word rather than the sentiment, the sense of the entire passage. This exceedingly vulgar kind of imitation, which has not unaptly been called *musical punning*, may be traced to a gross misapprehension of the rule, that 'the sound should seem an echo to the sense,' and is the vice not only of composers of an inferior order, but, occasionally, of some of the highest class. The great Handel himself is not wholly exempt from its influence. In the fine chorus, 'Wretched lovers, quit your dream' (in *Acis and Galatea*), when the line 'Hark! how the thund'ring giant roars' occurs, he makes the basses roar in a long division, till they nearly gasp for breath. But this is a verb that proves very seductive to composers; in two of our best glees it sets the voice a-roaring through several bars:—in the one, because the poet (Ossian) asks, 'Who comes so dark from ocean's roar?' In the other, because the poet (Gray) says, 'The rocks and nodding groves re-bellow to the roar!' Handel's favorite air, 'What passion cannot music raise and quell?' from Dryden's *Ode to St. Cecilia's Day*, sends the voice tumbling down a full octave at the words 'faces fell.' In the same work the singer is condemned to ascend to a note which few can reach, and none can sustain without lungs of very unusual capacity, merely because the author says, 'The trumpet shall be raised on high.' Our greatest English composer, Purcell, could not resist the temptation offered by the words 'They that go down to the sea in ships,' from the 107th Psalm, in setting which he commits the bass voice to so very low a deep, that there was only one man in

this day who could sing the anthem. 'Some eminent musicians,' Sir William Jones observes, 'have been absurd enough to think of imitating laughter and other noises; but if they had succeeded, they would not have made amends for their want of taste in attempting it; for such ridiculous imitations must necessarily destroy the spirit and dignity of the finest poems.' This discerning and elegant writer most likely points at the song and chorus, 'Haste thee, nymph,' in Handel's setting of Milton's *L'Allegro*, in which is the line, 'And Laughter holding both his sides.' The singers in this, it must be allowed, never baulk the intention of the composer, but affect to laugh almost convulsively. To carry out the design to its utmost extent, they should cast away their books, press their ribs firmly with both hands, and, by adding action to sound, complete the living picture. In another song by Handel, which was once very popular, in the oratorio of *Semele*, is a remarkable instance of a mistaken attempt at imitation. The words are—

'The warbling lark to mine accords his note,  
And tunes to my distress his warbling throat.'

These lines (foisted into Congreve's poem) are silly enough; but the composer has rendered them perfectly ludicrous, by one of those long-winded *divisions* which were the besetting sin of the age, on the word 'warbling.' In the midst of her distress, *Semele* and two fiddles—the latter representing the bird—strive who shall best mimic the soaring songster, till the lady is obliged to yield, from pure exhaustion. The mention of the lark has entrapped many a composer; the musical follies committed in his name are innumerable. Handel's song, 'Sweet Bird,' from *Il Penseroso*, always has been, and most likely always will be, admired as music, and it affords an opportunity for the display of talent in the singer and the flute-player, but it cannot stand the test of criticism. The same objection exists to this as to the air just noticed; the divisions are in themselves absurd, but as imitations are still more so. Surely the composer must have been aware that the note of the nightingale is the simplest that is practised by the feathered race, yet he has here given the melancholy bird sounds which, as regards variety, rapidity, and compass, only able performers can produce from a fine voice and a perfect instrument. Handel's supremacy in the art renders him especially liable to animadversion when misled by an erroneous conception of the words; but he has been charged with many supposed imitations which he never contemplated, such as the *whipping-chorus*, the *rocking-chorus*, &c. We have however said as much as is necessary on this part of the subject.

In the accompaniment to vocal music, much greater freedom of imitation is allowable than in the voice part: kept within those bounds which good sense and cultivated taste prescribe, it affords very efficient aid, by giving greater force to the poetry, and contributing to the comple-

tion of the general design. It also adds harmony to song, a most important, if not an indispensable support. Nearly all that imitation can do, should—as the elder Dr. Gregory, of Edinburgh, in some admirable remarks on music has observed—be assigned to the accompaniments, as these, on account of the greater compass and variety of instruments, are better adapted to such a purpose than the voice, which ought to be left at liberty to express the sentiments. If Handel has sometimes failed in imitations by the voice, he has often succeeded in those by the accompanying instruments. We need but refer in proof to his beautiful song in *Il Penseroso*—

‘ Oft on a plat of rising ground  
I hear the far-off curfew sound,—

where he has imitated the bell by the deep-toned strings of the basses, confining the voice to those notes of pleasing, contemplative melancholy, the idea of which the words so completely excite. The same skill and discrimination are shown in the song of Galatea, ‘Hush! ye pretty warbling quire,’ in which the flute imitates the bird, leaving the singer to express in simple sounds that languishing tenderness indicated by the poetry. Handel was the first who endeavoured to excite the idea of light through the agency of musical sounds: his chorus in the oratorio of *Samson*, ‘O first created beam!’ was written with this design; and moreover suggested to Haydn that grand composition on the same subject which is admitted to be one of his noblest triumphs. But the still bolder attempt of the former great master was to convey to the mind, through the same medium, a notion of darkness. With this view he composed the sublime chorus in *Israel in Egypt*, beginning, ‘He sent a thick darkness over all the land,’ the accompaniments to which, assisted by the words, produce on persons susceptible of musical impressions, all that solemnity of effect, not unmixed with awe, intended by the author.

Haydn, though sometimes ambitious of achieving by musical means more than the art can accomplish, was often most happy in indirect imitation by instrumental accompaniments; witness the magnificent burst of sound in the first chorus—to which we have just alluded—in *The Creation*, at the words, ‘And there was light.’ Witness also his musical picture, in the same oratorio, of the rising sun, the slow swell of the instruments in ascending notes describing the gradual progress of the luminary towards the horizon, and the full power of the band depicting its refulgent splendour. And how beautifully the composer contrasts with the solar blaze, the soft, serene beams of the comparatively small orb which reflects its borrowed light! Madame de Staël heard the first of these most masterly compositions performed at Vienna, ‘in a manner,’ she tells us, ‘worthy of the great work,’ and describes the sound of the combined voices and instruments as a *terrible noise*! She adds, that *at the appearance of light it was necessary to*

*stop one’s ears*. We forgive the bad taste for the sake of the wit. This generally sagacious and acute, and always brilliant, writer, is quite an Italian in her musical criticism: she says that the Germans ‘put too much mind in their works; they reflect too much on what they are doing.’ Of Mozart, whose illustrations of the poet are enumerated among his excellencies by most critics, Madame de Staël speaks in what we consider highly laudatory terms, but by which she means to express some degree of misapprobation. She thinks that ‘of all musicians he has shown most skill in “marrying” the music to the words:’ that in his operas, particularly *Don Giovanni*, he makes us sensible of all the effect of dramatic representation: that ‘this ingenious alliance of the musician and poet gives us a sort of pleasure, but it is a pleasure which springs from *reflection*, and that does not belong to the wonderful sphere of the arts.’ (*De l’Allemagne*.) The ‘alliance’ here complained of could not have been alleged as a fault in Rossini’s earlier works, beautiful as some of them are in other respects; though the air ‘La Calunnia,’ the first finale in *Otello*, and two or three other things, offer as fine examples of what is meant by musical imitation as can be found. But in his ‘second style’—the manner in which his later operas are written—he seems to have been *infected*, as Madame de Staël would have said, by German intellectuality. We know not if the highly-talented lady whose judgment in music we have ventured to impugn was acquainted with the compositions of Weber; if she ever heard his *Freischütz* or *Oberon*, he must have been placed by her very high on the list of those who damage and degrade music by rendering it expressive,—who, as Pope ironically says, in some lines complimentary to Handel,

‘ ——— meanly borrow aid from sense.’

Music, which is both a science and an art, is divided into *Speculative* or theoretical, and *Practical*. Speculative music explains the nature of musical sounds; shows, by demonstrating their ratios, how they are related to each other; and investigates their physical and moral effects when in a simple or in a combined state: it is, in few words, the philosophy of the art. Practical Music is the application of theoretical principles,—the proper conduct of sounds as to their progression, duration, union, and adaptation to words, voices, and instruments, and is the art of composition. The performer, who merely executes, stands in the same relation to music as the actor does to the drama, or the reciter does to the poem: though he requires, in order to excel, considerable knowledge of the subject and superior taste, yet he is but an operator—a singer or a player, and not, strictly speaking, a musician.

Speculative Music is subdivided into Acoustical, Mathematical, and Metaphysical. Practical Music, into Vocal and Instrumental.

## HISTORY OF MUSIC.

The origin of music is involved in an obscurity which no ingenuity, no labour, has hitherto been able to dispel; analogy and conjecture therefore have supplied the want of facts, in the absence of any assistance except what doubtful histories and the fables of mythologists have afforded, which at best have held out but a dim light, and more often misled than aided the inquirer in his researches.

It has been supposed by some writers whose names stamp a value on all that has proceeded from them, that song and speech are coeval, an opinion which will hardly be disputed, if by song are meant sounds which, though vocal and sustained, are devoid of rhythm, governed by no scale, and consequently productive of no melody, in the modern acceptation of the word: but if the term is intended to signify a regular system of tunable, measured notes, then we shall not hesitate to say, that such advance towards art could only have been made by people proceeding fast in civilization, and communing through the medium of a language adequate to all the ordinary purposes of man in a social state.

We are told by Lucretius, in a passage often quoted from the fifth book of his poem *De Rerum Natura* (*Of the Nature of Things*), that the birds taught man to sing, and that the invention of musical instruments of the inflatable kind was suggested to him by the sounds produced from reeds when the western wind blew over them.

—the birds instructed man,  
And taught him songs before his art began.  
And while soft evening gales blew o'er the plains,  
And shook the sounding reeds, they taught the swains;  
And thus the pipe was fram'd, and tuneful reed.\*

This has certainly the merit of being very poetical, whatever reliance the historian may place on it. The same notion concerning wind instruments is found in Ovid's beautiful account of the transformation of the nymph Syrinx into reeds. But Thomas Aquinas, the 'Angelic doctor,' cited by the good Padre Giambattista Martini, in his *Storia della Musica*, disdains to follow the example of the heathen author of the 'Metamorphoses,' or the disciple of Epicurus, and leaves the origin of music to chance; on the contrary, the noble Italian saint informs us that the first man was endowed by the Creator with every kind of knowledge, and that he excelled in music, as well as in all other arts and sciences.

But quitting the ingenious guesses and fictions of poets and the reveries of enthusiasts, we find Jubal, the seventh in descent from Adam, mentioned in Scripture as 'the father of such as handle the *harp* and *organ*.' These terms, however, must not be understood quite literally; they are generic, and signify all instruments of the stringed and tube kind. The different versions vary in the translation of the original: the French render the word *harp* by *violon*. Though the earliest authentic record of music

extant is that in *Genesis*, yet it is nearly certain that the Jews acquired their knowledge of it from the Egyptians. That Moses himself was educated by Pharaoh's daughter as her own son, and was 'learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians,' is stated in the *Acts of the Apostles*; and Clemens Alexandrinus adds, that 'he was instructed by them, in his maturer age, in arithmetic, geometry, rhythm, harmony, but, above all, in medicine and music.' The whole generation of the Israelites led forth by the lawgiver from their captivity were born in Egypt, in which it seems to be agreed music as an art originated; though Diodorus Siculus even denies that it was ever practised there: but his assertion is not only in opposition to Herodotus, and at utter variance with what Plato says, who travelled into that country to become acquainted with the arts and sciences, but is proved by modern discoveries to be the very reverse of truth. The fresco painting of a harp, found by Bruce in an ancient tomb near the ruins of Thebes, which is undoubtedly of very high antiquity, is an indisputable proof of the progress made by the early Egyptians in music. In form, dimensions, and ornament, this instrument might be mistaken for one of modern date, inasmuch that when a drawing of it was first shown in London, considerable doubts were entertained of its fidelity. Forty years after, however, M. Denon bore testimony to the truth of Bruce's description and the accuracy of his sketch; since which Rosellini's *Monumenti dell'Egitto*, a splendid work published in 1832, has confirmed all that the two former had said on the subject. Another instrument, which is found sculptured on an Egyptian obelisk brought to Rome by Augustus, furnishes additional evidence of the state of music in Egypt in the remotest times. It is fully described by Dr. Burney, who gives a wood-cut of it, by which it appears that it was nearly the same as the Neapolitan *Calascione* of the present day. It had only two strings, but, being provided with a long neck, was capable of producing that series of sounds which the ancients called a heptachord; and if the strings were tuned fifths, like those on the *calascione*, they would give a complete octave, an advantage which none of the Grecian instruments possessed till many ages later. Montfaucon says that 'in examining the representations of near five hundred ancient lyres, &c., he never met with one in which there was any contrivance for shortening strings, during the time of performance, by a neck and finger-board.' These two instruments, then, are sufficient proofs of early Egyptian knowledge in the musical art.\* That it continued to be cultivated in Egypt under the

\* There are some Egyptian paintings in the British Museum which were brought from the grottoes in the western hills of Thebes. In one of them (No. 179) a female figure is represented blowing the double pipe, and another appears to be playing on a musical instrument. (*Lib. of Entertaining Knowledge; British Museum*, vol. ii., p. 76.)

Macedonian dynasty there can be no doubt. Athenæus, in his account of a Bacchic festival given by Ptolemy Philadelphus—the munificent patron of all the liberal and useful arts, who made Egypt the mart of the world—tells us that more than six hundred musicians were employed in the chorus, and that among these were three hundred performers on the cithara, or lyre.

(To be continued.)

### Brief Chronicle of the last Month.

**AIGBURTH.**—The members of the Aigburth Choral Society gave their second concert in the school room, Aigburth Vale, on May the 14th. The programme was well selected. The principals were Miss Sharp, Miss Monkhouse, Messrs. Rowley, Foulkes, and Hughes. Mr. Harrison conducted.

**ARDWICK, Manchester.**—A concert was given on the 17th ult. in the Ardwick Town Hall, by the Choral Society. Mr. John Downs, Jun., conducted, and Mr. G. E. Broadbent presided at the piano. The room was crowded. A well-selected programme was provided.

**BASSINGBOURNE.**—On the 12th ult. the members of the church choir sang a selection of music in the National School-room, which was very prettily decorated for the occasion. The members of the choir acquitted themselves very creditably under the bâton of their conductor, Mr. Crole.

**BAYSWATER.**—The Musical Society of Bayswater performed Handel's oratorio, *Judas Maccabæus*, on Thursday evening, April the 23rd. After the performance the members presented their conductor, Mr. William Carter, with a handsome timepiece, in token of their high appreciation of his services.

**BIRMINGHAM.**—An open rehearsal of the Amateur Harmonic Association took place on the 12th of May, when the performance consisted of Sterndale Bennett's Ode, Weber's Mass in G, and Mendelssohn's *Athalie*. The society deserves great praise for making so good a selection of music.

**BLACKBURN.**—On Tuesday, the 14th ult., a miscellaneous concert, promoted by Mr. Field, was given in the Assembly Rooms, Town Hall, in aid of the relief funds. The vocalists were Mrs. Sunderland, Miss Arabella Smith, Messrs. Baron, Towers, and Birkett. Mr. Joseph M. Field played two solos on the pianoforte.

**BLAKESLEY.**—The choir of this village gave their annual concert on Friday, May the 1st, comprising glees, part-songs, and duets. Mr. Richard Cave conducted, and Mr. Barker accompanied on the harmonium.

**BLERCHINGLY.**—On the 22nd of April the members of the Choral Society gave their first annual concert, under the direction of Mr. L. S. Palmer. The programme consisted of sacred and secular music.

**BOTLEY.**—On the 6th of May an evening concert was given in the Market Hall by the Bitterne Choral Society. Several of the glees and choruses were well executed. Mr. F. Barnes was the conductor.

**BROMPTON.**—A new Mass, composed by Signor Roberti, has lately been performed at the Oratory, Brompton, which has been greatly admired. The Mass is skilfully put together, and combines great purity of style with originality of idea.

**BUXTON.**—The Buxton Choral Society gave their second concert of the season in the Ball-room on Tuesday evening, the 21st of April. The performance was very creditable. Conductor, Mr. Barlow, Professor of Music of Congleton, who has been for some time the instructor of the Choral Society.

**CAMBRIDGE.**—The music class of the Church of England Young Men's Society, assisted by numerous friends, gave a concert on May the 1st, in the Assembly Room, Guildhall. The programme included Prof. Bennett's "May Queen," Weber's Pianoforte Concerto in C, Dr. Calcott's "Queen of the Valley," Bishop's "Chough and Crow," with orchestral accompaniments, &c. Solo singers—Mrs. Bailey, and Messrs. Bilton, Piper, Robinson, F. Smith, Ward, and Penson.

**CANTERBURY.**—On the 27th of April Mr. Longhurst gave a concert, including various classical and popular pieces. Mdle. Florence Lancia, Mrs. Baxter, Mr. Cross, Mr. Rhodes, Mr. Plant, and Mr. Longhurst were the vocalists, and Mr. George Nicholson performed a solo on the flute.

**CAPE.**—The Cape Town subscription to the Lancashire Relief Fund has lately been increased by the performance of the *Messiah*, on the 4th and 6th of March, in the Catholic Cathedral. The proceeds, after payment of all expenses, amounted to £200. The Cape Argus newspaper speaks in the highest terms of the manner in which the oratorio was sung.

**CARSHALTON, Surrey.**—The Carshalton Vocal and Instrumental Association gave a sacred and secular concert for a charitable purpose on Monday, the 18th ult. The programme consisted chiefly of choruses from the oratorios and masses, together with a number of glees, &c. Mr. Hand conducted.

**CHISLEHURST, Kent.**—A choral union of male voices alone, for Kent and Surrey, is being formed; the object being to bring together the best voices in one large body for the performance of good music for male voices at periodical gatherings. Mr. Griffiths, Professor of Music, Chislehurst, has the management of the union.

**COMMERCIAL ROAD.**—A concert took place in the St. Mary's School Room, on the 12th ult., for the benefit of the Ragged Schools connected with this institution. Mr. Gurson conducted, and the principal vocalists were Mrs. Marshall, Mr. Saunders, and Mr. Clark; Miss Gursen presided at the pianoforte.

**CRYSTAL PALACE.**—The directors have brilliantly opened the new season by a grand performance of Mendelssohn's music to *Athalie*. The band and chorus numbered about 2,500 performers, under the direction of Mr. Costa. Mdle. Parepa, Miss Martin, and Madame Sainton-Dolby were the soloists, and Mr. Phelps recited the illustrative verses. The music selected on this occasion was by no means well adapted to so large an area, and the voice of Mr. Phelps was almost inaudible, but notwithstanding these drawbacks, it was a very fine performance. The choruses went steadily, and were well in tune. In the march, played by the band, splendid effect was produced by the addition of the organ at the close. After *Athalie* was ended, the two exhibition overtures, by Meyerbeer and Auber, were admirably performed, between which the choir sang Mendelssohn's unaccompanied part-song, "Oh Forest deep and gloomy," an additional charm being given to it from the contrast of unaccompanied voices between two orchestral pieces; it was warmly encored. The musical season, so well begun, is to be followed by eight Saturday concerts, on a large scale, the first of which was given on the 9th of May, in the concert room, to an audience which more than filled every available space. Carlotta Patti was the great attraction, assisted by Madame Lemmens Sherrington and Signor Delle Sedie; M. Vieuxtemp, violinist; Herr Jael, pianist. The programme was varied and excellent. To those who are in the habit of attending the palace it is unnecessary to say one word in praise of the band, but the effect of due attention to rehearsal is marked at the public performance by a precision and completeness of execution not easily to be excelled.

**DEPTFORD.**—The members of the St. Paul's Choral Society gave a concert, on the 11th ult., in aid of the funds of the New National Infant and Sunday Schools,